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A RIVERWALK FOR WARREN, OHIO

RENEW PLAN: River Edges-New Environment for Warren.

One excellent way to celebrate the bicentennial of Warren's founding in 1999 is to refocus on the developmental and recreational potential of the Mahoning River. The community has largely forgotten about the river and this asset has become neglected. The City of Warren can realize a rebirth by returning and reclaiming its river.

The City has chosen a particular plan of action for the future use of the Mahoning River and the natural corridor that still persists along its banks and flood plain. This strategy is known formally as the RENEW PLAN and popularly as the RiverWalk. It is subtitled: River Edges-New Environment for Warren. This strategy covers the central section of the river through Warren from Burbank Park in the north to south of Gould Stewart Park. This plan proposes to link with walkways and paths the existing City Parks situated on the Mahoning River and to focus this recreational system on the downtown. The Renew Plan will provide new and enhanced ways for people to enjoy the outdoors in the heart of the City and to preserve and protect wildlife habitat. The River Edges-New Environment for Warren scheme plans to remake the image of the Mahoning River and in the process that of the City itself. The plan is subdivided into a number of separate sections so that the whole proposal can be phased in over time as funds become available and land cost are minimized.

The heart of the plan is the first phase. This portion, known as the RiverWalk, begins in Monumental Park opposite Court House Square, links up with Perkins Park and follows the Mahoning River to Summit Street Bridge. The most vital segment in the first phase of the RiverWalk covers the initial 900 feet from Monumental Park to Perkins Park and includes the Kinsman and former Smith House properties. This segment is a more formalized and enlarged part designed to complement the space and uses of Court House Park. This vital part of the RiverWalk is the Stephen Foster Promenade. The Promenade is designed as a wide pedestrian, carriage and bicycle boulevard and a series of public facilities able to support large festivals and events. The festival support functions are needed so that when celebrations are held downtown West Market Street and North Park Avenue can remain open to traffic. Thus, the Square, Monumental Park and the Stephen Foster Promenade along with lower Mahoning Avenue will support festivals while freeing up the rest of downtown for commerce and traffic flow. This rational arrangement will not only enhance the downtown as a suitable place for major events but also allow expanded commerce to be conducted simultaneously.

Today, only 56 of these townships (most of the squares are now located in towns and cities) still have a public space at the center; and only five communities in the Western Reserve have had the fortitude to expand the area of their central spaces. Warren, the original county seat and first place to have a civic heart should join these few far-seeing progressive communities. The Stephen Foster Promenade presents an opportunity to set Warren apart and give it a unique position by constructing the RiverWalk. The combination of Court House Square, Monumental Park, Kinsman House, City Hall Park and the RiverWalk will give Warren the largest civic space at the heart of any place in the Western Reserve. Such a RiverWalk has long been anticipated in Warren but never as yet actually brought into existence. The last Perkins to live in the mansion that is City Hall voiced the dream that someday Perkins Park would be connected to the square. This dream was left to others to accomplish because shortly after she left Warren for good. An informal riverside path has existed for generations. Civic leadership can realize this dream.

INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM COMPOENT

The RiverWalk is an integral part of the proposed and partly assembled right-of-way for the planned Great Ohio Lake to River GreenWay Trail (GOLRGT). This multipurpose trail concept is the goal of the Great Ohio Lake to River GreenWay Coalition. This organization is comprised of private and public organizations led by the park district in each county (Ashtabula, Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana) and with the participation and support of the City of Warren. The GOLRGT will be a multi-purpose ninety plus mile trail linking Lake Erie at Ashtabula Harbor to East Liverpool on the Ohio River.

A vital portion of the trail is to follow the Mahoning River through the City of Warren. In the future, this north/south trail can be linked eastward to Pennsylvania and westward toward Akron. The GOLRGT's course through Warren will be the RiverWalk. The RiverWalk from its Phase One terminus at the Summit Street Bridge will continue northward in future phases by two means.

One will continue along the Mahoning river northward and then follow a tributary stream to the campus. The other, and more likely in the short run, will parallel short line railroad rights-of-way from just north of the Summit/Mahoning intersection to the southern terminus of the Western Reserve GreenWay Trail. Both of these will join the Western Reserve GreenWay Trail (Trumbull County portion of the GOLRT) at Kent State University's Trumbull Branch Campus.

Southward, a spur of the RiverWalk will connect with abandoned rail right-of-way and private property of WCI Steel Company to link up in Niles and then further south into the Mahoning County portion of the GOLRGT.

In Niles, the GOLRGT will have additional connections to Girard, Youngstown, Lowellville and into Pennsylvania via the existing Savich Trail. There are other possible spurs, both east and west, from the spine of the Great Ohio Lake to River GreenWay Trail. The Great Northern Cross Country Trail intersects with the GOLRGT in Ashtabula County. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is nearing completion of multiple trails that will connect the Pittsburgh area with Washington, D. C. This Pennsylvania Trail system will link with the Savich Trail in New Castle, Pennsylvania and thereby gain access to the GOLRGT. These are only a few of the potential links with the GOLRGT.

The GOLRGT Coalition members are currently in control of much of the needed right-of-way and this summer there will be construction of portions of the Trail in all four counties. This level of activity is an increase from last year's construction in two counties on the GOLRGT. Warren's RiverWalk is a vital link in this system. It is important that our progress be maintained at a pace with the rest of the GOLRGT. Completion of the First Phase: RiverWalk will demonstrate through use the high potential of the RiverWalk and the GOLRGT.

The Great Ohio Lake to River GreenWay Trail can transform the way local people and non-residents perceive the entire eastern tier of counties. We can attain this new status through completion of the multiple portions of the Trail that are under separate jurisdiction, but which are all coordinated as if it were but one.